

Research on Jewish History and Culture

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at the German Historical Institute in Warsaw



Research on Jewish History and Culture at the German Historical Institute in Warsaw

A key area of activity for the German Historical Institute in Warsaw is Jewish studies. Members of the Institute involved in these endeavors actively cooperate with international research centers also pursuing Jewish studies; they frequently participate in worldwide conferences on this subject and regularly publish their research in articles in prestigious journals and scholarly publications. The projects initiated in the German Historical Institute in Warsaw are of an interdisciplinary character, with historical and cultural perspectives playing a significant role.

Jewish historical research conducted by Institute employees encompasses all time periods. The scholars examine the history of Jewish communities in temporal and spatial dimensions (e.g. Jews in Eastern Europe), tracing the fate of Jews in both the Middle Ages and early modern period (e.g. studies conducted by Jürgen Heyde and Maria Cieśla). The Institute's researchers are particularly interested in the history of the 19th and 20th centuries, as exemplified by the work of Jürgen Hensel, Gertrud Pickhan, Katrin Steffen and Katrin Stoll.

The results of this research are presented in a variety of Institute publications, including printed source materials and monographs, as well as edited volumes of articles on many aspects of the history of Jews and Jewish-Christian relations in all historical periods. The most common topics covered by these publications are the Holocaust and recent Jewish history. Jewish themes have been elaborated on, amongst other places, in the series “Klio in Polen” (Klio in Poland) and



Publications of the German Historical Institute in Warsaw

Cover illustration: Synagogue in Lesko (Photographer: Ł. Smyrski)

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“Klio w Niemczech” (Klio in Germany). For example, important works from Jerzy Tomaszewski, Ruta Sakowska, Hanna Zaremska and Monika Polit have been translated into German, while monographs by Shulamit Volkov and Gertrud Pickhan have appeared in Polish. Publications devoted to Jewish issues are also developed in cooperation with other research centers. One example of this would be a monograph on the role of reading in the Jewish community produced in cooperation with the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

Jewish history has also been the subject of numerous conferences, colloquiums and discussions organized by the Institute. Examples of this would be an event organized in 1997 to mark the 100th anniversary of the “Bund” and a conference on Jews and townspeople in the former Republic of Poland, which took place in 2002. Seminars on recent Jewish history are of particular interest, with frequent academic events dedicated to the subject done in cooperation with Polish research institutes. In 2002–2005 two conferences on the Holocaust in Poland were organized together with the Polish Institute of National Remembrance. Other conferences organized in cooperation with the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw were devoted to the issue of employment in the ghettos (2010) and the dilemma of Jews in choosing their place of residence after World War II (2011 and 2012). In joint cooperation with the POLIN Museum of



Conference “Antisemitism in East Central Europe”, 2013 (Photo: German Historical Institute in Warsaw)

the History of Polish Jews, the German Historical Institute in Warsaw is organizing for September 2017 a workshop on the concept of space in Jewish research. The Institute also organizes meetings on Jewish history in close cooperation with research centers in other countries. One could point here to a workshop on “The Holocaust and Its Aftermath from the Family Perspective” (2017) which is being co-organized together with the Institute of Modern History of the Czech Academy of Sciences and the French Research Center in Humanities and Social Sciences (CEFRES) in Prague. A detailed schedule of the Institute’s seminars on Jewish history can be found on its website.

Jewish themes are also discussed at weekly colloquiums where scholars at the Institute present the current findings of their work. The Institute’s scholarship program plays a significant role in the academic life of the Institute, which supports many students, especially PhD and junior academics, who come to Warsaw to do research work in local archives. Each year several scholars are hosted as they develop research projects in Jewish history. The Institute also hosts visiting fellows with a track record of major scholarly achievements, who not only develop their own research topics, but also actively participate in the on-going work of the Institute. Prominent historians engaged in Jewish themes who have stayed in our center in recent years include Paweł Maciejko from Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and Joanna B. Michlic from the University of Bristol.

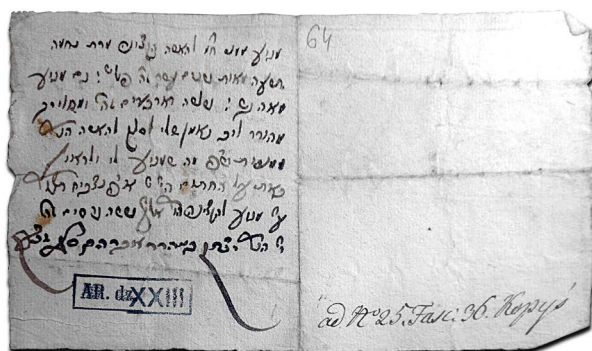
Jewish topics are worked on at the German Historical Institute in Warsaw both in the context of stand-alone projects as well as ancillary aspects of other research undertakings. In what follows, the most recent research projects addressing issues in Jewish history and culture are presented.

Research Program “Regionality and Region Formation”

Maria Cieřla: An Economic Region in Eastern Europe as a Site of Activity of Jewish Entrepreneurs

(start of the project: February 2015)

The aim of the project is to describe the economic region formed by Jewish entrepreneurs, with “region” understood as an activity field of individuals. At the center of the research are the networks formed by these representatives of Jewish economic elites. To focus on the role of individuals in research on Jewish history is very important. Up to now, Jews in the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth have mostly been presented as an anonymous group. However, as studies focused on Western Europe have shown, taking into account the perspective of individuals enables an innovative approach to issues relating to the functioning of Jews within Christian communities. The project poses the following questions: Where were the borders of the economic region that arose as a consequence of the Jewish entrepreneurs’ business activity? What relation did these borders have to the existing political borders? What strategies were used to build economic networks? How did ethnic, religious and social borders function within such networks? Answers to these questions can be found through an analysis of source material about the brothers Gedal and Szmojł Ickowicz, two magnates’ agents who were commodity brokers and leaseholders of numerous complexes of manorial properties. They were active merchants in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the first half of the 18th century.



Invoice of a co-worker of Szmojł Ickowicz, AGAD AR XXIII, t. 34, p. 1, s. 64

The source base for the research is comprised of letters and economic records from the Szmojł and Gedal Ickowicz archive stored in the Radziwiłłs’ archives in Warsaw and Minsk.

Joanna Nalewajko-Kulikow: One Jewishness or Several? The Picture of Regional Differences in the Warsaw Yiddish Press of 1918–1922

(project duration: February–December 2015)

The aim of this project was to define what role regional differences played in the Yiddish press discourse in 1918–1922. These years represent a decisive phase for the Jewish community in Poland. The Polish state already existed formally, even though its borders had still not been conclusively established. The Jewish press published debates on the place of Jews in this new reality. Was the Jewish community really monolithic, as the Polish authorities presented it at the time? How did the Jewish press portray the differences between Jews from various parts of partitioned Poland, and were these differences underlined and highlighted, or rather ignored? How closely coupled was this discourse with the internal conflicts between the distinct groups of Russian and Galician Zionists within the Zionist Organization? The research was based on the analysis of two Warsaw daily broadsheets which had widespread circulation: *Hajnt* (1908–1939) and *Der Moment* (1910–1939). The project was situated in a field of research that has gained in popularity: the analysis of the Jewish press in Poland. The goal of the project was to come to a clearer understanding of the internal changes in the community of Polish Jews at the beginning of the interwar period.



Front page of an issue of the Warsaw daily newspaper *Hajnt*.
Source: Polona, <https://polona.pl/item/927375/0/>

Research Program “National Identity and Transnational Entanglements”

Ruth Leiserowitz:

A Study of 19th Century Europe. The Interaction of Transnational Correlations and National Identity

(project duration: 2010–2016)

The project focused on an analysis of selected biographies of inhabitants of 19th-century Warsaw, with the target group being those people born in the period 1770–1870 who studied abroad and used their foreign experience and networks upon returning to Warsaw. Because of a lack of educational establishments and a level of teaching that was generally poor, many people from Warsaw decided to study abroad, thereby forging international contacts that led to an exchange of ideas and solutions.

The goal of the project was to locate inhabitants of Warsaw on the cultural and scientific map of Europe of this period, as well as describe the directions of the cultural and scientific transfer described above. It was also important to show the impact which those inhabitants of Warsaw who received their education abroad had on the discussions and debates in Poland, as well as their introduction of innovations in various fields. A significant part of the project was to compare the activities of the Jewish and Polish communities. The fundamental assumption upon which the project proceeded was that in the course of the development of European localizations and networks in various fields, as well as the progressive transfer within the continental arena of entanglements teeming with culture and science, the national identity of those living in Warsaw was also being affected.



Ward in the pavilion for pulmonary patients of the New Hospital of the Old Testament Believers in Warsaw, in: Nowy Szpital Starozakonnych w Warszawie. Księga Pamiątkowa. Sprawozdanie Komitetu Budowy, Warszawa 1909

Ruth Leiserowitz:

Jewish Areas of Commerce in Transition 1772–1850

(start of the project: January 2017)

At the center of this study are Jewish merchants in the region of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Rzeczpospolita), extending from Witebsk and Minsk across to Düna and up to Vilnius and Kaunas. The changes to be discussed took place over the course of the several partitionings and the ensuing time periods, continuing up until the construction of the



Georg Emanuel Opiz, Polish merchants at the Leipzig trade fair, before 1841

railroads began. How were the territorial partitions and the sense of now belonging to new states reflected in the business behavior of the merchants, their activities and relationships? The study intends to produce and illustrate examples of the “spatial praxis” (Henri Lefebvre) and in what sense within the time period of the survey the commercial spaces in the everyday context changed. This will include a description of how the representations of space changed, thus how the northern regions of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were then perceived, that is to say, in what way the apprehension of areal affiliation gradually developed. What kind of new configurations and entanglements arose, and what kind of scope did they have?

The aim of the project is to deconstruct and investigate the narrative of a seamless transition from the Polish-Lithuanian Rzeczpospolita to the Jewish Pale of Settlement; a question is whether or how the Jewish actors who are at the center of the investigation perceived the historical transformation. In addition to that, new localizations in a divided space will be shown.

Anna Novikov: You Are What You Wear – German, Polish and Jewish Visual Nationalization through Fashion in Partitioned Poland (1848–1914)

(project duration: 2013–2015)

This project analyzed the role of fashion, clothing, appearance and style in the visualization of national identity. The target groups were Poles and Jews living in Warsaw, Lviv and Poznań between 1848 and 1914. The central question was about the visual representation of the national identity of particular groups. What were the factors that influenced the creation of visual identity forms, and how did this process develop over the course of time? The project went beyond social and cultural-historical issues, covering many aspects of the history of art, anthropology, visual history and philosophy. The project's methodological innovation lay in its combination of research on fashion and the development of nationalism in 19th-century Poland. The project was based, amongst others, on the findings of Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard and Mikhail Bakhtin. Research was done in archives in Lviv and Warsaw, but also in Jerusalem and the U.S.



Couple wearing traditional costumes.
Source: Ethnographic Museum in Krakow, MEK 57357/ 467

Stephan Lehnstaedt: Occupation and Economics in Poland During the First and the Second World Wars

(project duration: 2010–2015)

This broad research project addressed many aspects of Jewish history, with a focus on the subject of forced labor in Jewish ghettos during the Second World War. This subject was elaborated on in two publications: first, the monograph *Arbeit in den nationalsozialistischen Ghettos* (edited in conjunction with Jürgen Hensel, 2013), and second, a special issue of *Zeitschrift für Genozidforschung* titled *Alltag im Ghetto. Strukturen, Ordnungen, Lebenswelt(en) im Blick neuer Forschung* (edited in conjunction with Kristin Platt, 2012).

Stephan Lehnstaedt actively participated in the meetings of the German Parliament's Committee on Labor and Social Affairs on the planned amendment to the law on pensions for victims of forced labor in ghettos. Working within the framework of the pension program for former ghetto inhabitants, Lehnstaedt conducted an investigation of the topic, dealing with the compensation for those persons who did not perish in the Holocaust. For his commitment to victims of Nazism living in Poland he was recognized with the "Missio reconciliationis" award by the Polish Social Association "Misja Pojednania" in 2015, and was awarded the "Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Medal" by the Association of Jewish Veterans and Victims of the Second World War.



Die Plakat der Besatzungsmächten in Russisch-Polen
Sammlung A. Wolf, Leipzig
Proclamation of the occupation authorities in Russian Poland

Research program “Functionality of History in Late Modernity”

Katrin Stoll: Historiography and Public Use of History in Late Modernity. Collective Symbols and Representations of the Holocaust in Germany and Poland

(start of the project: February 2015)

Drawing on case studies in Poland and Germany, this project addresses the societal significance of historical studies in late modernity by analyzing the interrelations between public debate and scientific research. Particular emphasis is placed on those critical-analytical interpretations that contradict the dominant narratives. Representations of the Holocaust in German historiographical discourse and public debates are analyzed on the basis of two examples. The first seeks to explore the discourse about 8 May as the “day of liberation” from National Socialism as well as the discourse strategies used by Germans in order to liberate themselves from the reality of the Nazi crimes and to avoid addressing the question of who did what where and when to the Jews in Europe between 1933 and 1945. The second case study is a critical analysis of the “normalizing” discourse in recent research on the perpetrators of Nazi crimes.

The Polish case study focuses on the definition and conceptualization of the term “extermination of the Jews” (*Zagłada*) as it is used and understood in both scientific and public discourse.

Historical events can never be objectified. Thus, the way we conceptualize and define an event has consequences for empirical research and the writing of history. Our understanding of an event also influences what we remember of it as well as how we remember it. The project deals with differences in interpretations of the Holocaust produced in academic research and in the activities in the public sphere in Poland. In this context, the debate concerning the location of the monument to the Polish Righteous on the former site of the Warsaw ghetto is analyzed. This example raises questions concerning the relevance of critical-analytical studies devoted to place and materiality in history in general and of site-based approaches to the Holocaust in particular.

Publications in the Research Area of Jewish History and Culture

The following monographs, source books, and translations related to the research area of Jewish history and culture have appeared in various series published by the German Historical Institute in Warsaw as well as outside of them.



Publications of the German Historical Institute in Warsaw

Series “Quellen und Studien” [Sources and Research Studies]

Vol. 10: Musial, Bogdan. *Deutsche Zivilverwaltung und Judenverfolgung im Generalgouvernement. Eine Fallstudie zum Distrikt Lublin 1939–1944*. Wiesbaden, 1999.

Vol. 17: Alberti, Michael. *Die Verfolgung und Vernichtung der Juden im Reichsgau Wartheland 1939–1945*. Wiesbaden, 2006.

Vol. 29: Heyde, Jürgen. *Transkulturelle Kommunikation und Verflechtung. Die jüdischen Wirtschaftseliten in Polen vom 14. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert*. Wiesbaden, 2014.

Series “Einzelveröffentlichungen des DHI Warschau” [Single Publications of the German Historical Institute in Warsaw]

Vol. 1: Hensel, Jürgen (ed.). *Polen, Deutsche und Juden in Lodz 1820–1939. Eine schwierige Nachbarschaft*. Osnabrück, 1999.

Vol. 10: Musial, Bogdan (ed.). *“Aktion Reinhardt”. Der Völkermord an den Juden im Generalgouvernement 1941–1944*. Osnabrück, 2004.

Vol. 21: Młynarczyk, Jacek Andrzej, and Jochen Böhrer (eds.). *Der Judenmord in den eingegliederten polnischen Gebieten 1939–1945*. Osnabrück, 2010.

Vol. 24: Leiserowitz, Ruth. *Sabbatleuchter und Kriegerverein. Juden in der ostpreussisch-litauischen Grenzregion 1812–1942*. Osnabrück, 2010.

Vol. 29: Hensel, Jürgen, and Stephan Lehnstaedt (eds.). *Arbeit in den nationalsozialistischen Ghettos*. Osnabrück, 2013.

Vol. 30: Dahlmann, Hans-Christian. *Antisemitismus in Polen 1968. Interaktionen zwischen Partei und Gesellschaft*. Osnabrück, 2013.

Vol. 34: Novikov, Anna. *Shades of a Nation. The Dynamics of Belonging among the Silesian and Jewish Populations in Eastern Upper Silesia (1922–1934)*. Osnabrück, 2015.

Series “Klio in Polen” [Klio in Poland]

Vol. 2: Sakowska, Ruta. *Menschen im Ghetto. Die jüdische Bevölkerung im besetzten Warschau 1939–1943*. Translated by Ruth Henning. Osnabrück, 1999.

Vol. 9: Tomaszewski, Jerzy. *Auftakt zur Vernichtung. Die Vertreibung polnischer Juden aus Deutschland im Jahre 1938*. Translated by Victoria Pollmann. Osnabrück, 2002.

Vol. 17: Zaremska, Hanna. *Juden im mittelalterlichen Polen und die Krakauer Judengemeinde*. Translated by Heidemarie Petersen. Osnabrück, 2013.

(forthcoming:) Vol. 18: Polit, Monika. *“Meine jüdische Seele fürchtet den Tag des Gerichts nicht”. Mordechaj Chaim Rumkowski – Wahrheit und Legende*. Translated by Heidemarie Petersen. Introduced by Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg and Jürgen Hensel. Osnabrück, 2017.

Series “Klio w Niemczech” [Klio in Germany]

Vol. 12: Volkov, Shulamit. *Pomysł na nowoczesność. Żydzi niemieccy w XIX i na początku XX wieku*. Translated by Justyna Górny and Patrycja Pieńkowska. Warszawa, 2006.

(forthcoming:) Vol. 21: Pickhan, Gertrud. *“Pod prąd”. Powszechny Żydowski Związek Robotniczy “Bund” w Polsce 1918–1939*. Translated by Adam Peszke. Warszawa, 2017.